



From mountain to sea

Education and Children’s Services Transition post Lockdown: Next Steps Discussion Paper

Introduction

The Deputy First Minister has established a COVID-19 Education Recovery Group which met for the first time on Friday 24th April, and which also established a number of sub-groups to work through the detail of how educational establishments will open as we move to the next stage of recovery. These very much link to the 11 groups established by ECS in Aberdeenshire so there should be good synergy between national and local approaches to our transition into the post lockdown period.

Considerations

It is clear that a phased return to schools and ELCC re-opening is going to have to look very different depending on the size and scale of the establishment and will continue to depend very much on how and when lockdown restrictions are eased and will be dependent on the latest scientific advice and medical data. There are some common considerations for all contexts, such as health and safety issues, safe travel and so forth, but there are various options to be considered in planning for some kind of return to schools which need to be explored.

Principles for Planning Next Steps

We are aware that there are varying levels of engagement with learning across our children and young people at present, and that is a great concern for many of our Head Teachers at present. However, in planning for a phased return we need to consider the following principles:

- The health, safety and wellbeing of children, young people and staff must be of paramount importance and we will always be guided by the national steer and direction
- Ensuring an equity of opportunity and experience, recognising that not all young people will return from the same “starting point” will be highly important
- Transition planning for key groups will need to be carefully planned and prioritised
- Conversations and collaboration with parents/carers and the community will be central to the process of developing a plan for each unique school context.

- Staff will require appropriate support, training and direction to allow them to have the skills required to “deliver differently”
- We will take a “One Aberdeenshire” approach and will work collaboratively across ECS and across the Council
- It is unlikely that there will not be a one-size fits all approach and local solutions for local contexts will be required

What Will a Phased Return Look Like?

Each school setting is different as are all the young people and families you all work with. Head Teachers know their schools and communities best and it is important that you engage your school communities as the current situation evolves.

As a service there are some key questions and areas that we all need to consider as outlined below;

- Consider what support you and your staff will need - practical, professional and personal – to enable a smooth return to working from school.
- Consider protocols around students coming into and leaving school buildings
- What support will be necessary to help children and young people return, reconnect and thrive back at school?
- What would learning and teaching look like across a week?
- How could we manage a “blended approach” between on-site and remote learning?
- Is there an opportunity to explore wider educational opportunities such as outdoor learning, work- based learning activities as part of the approach, in partnership with others including NESCoL, DYWNE and others?
- How might inputs from Active Schools and other external partners e.g. AFCCT, where used be factored in to the school week?
- How might social distancing be possible in your own school context?
- How do we deal with transitions?
- What factors would we need to take into account for children and young people with ASN, who are at risk or vulnerable?
- How will you gather the views of your own parents if you have not done so already?
- Consider the reduction of furniture and equipment in teaching spaces.

To support your discussions at school level, the questions below are also useful to consider and are currently actively being considered by the local authority at present;

- Which groups might you consider could return in the first instance?
- How might that look on a part time basis?
- What might a manageable rota look like for pupils and staff?

- What would safe travel look like for your children and young
- Will we open all schools at the same time?
- How will schools operate alongside childcare hub provision if this continues medium to long term?
- Could we consider teachers in class, teaching their pupils, some of whom might be in class, some at home? What might this look like and what would be the barriers?

We may of course get national direction on some of those questions, but until we do, we need to be proactively preparing for a very different medium to long term future.

Ultimately, it is likely that there will be no one plan, but individual plans for each setting, but we must work together within clusters and across Aberdeenshire in order to share good ideas and practice across all sectors in order for us to achieve the best outcomes for all.

The conversations you all have at school and cluster level will also need to include parents, young people themselves and your local GIRFEC groups and LMGs as support will be required from across our community partners.

Next Steps

We will continue to update all Head Teachers at our weekly Skype calls and will keep you informed of the progress being made nationally by the Education Recovery Group and its sub-groups. We will be using this to inform our Aberdeenshire ECS working groups and again, once these are fully up and running, we will issue relevant support and advice and update at weekly Skype calls.

We would urge you to start having the conversations on next steps at local and cluster levels, using the prompts above to support you and share your thinking with your cluster leads who will feed all the information back in to ECS so we can support and advise as best we can.

In time, this local thinking, conversation and discussion – informed by the national direction - will allow us to prepare for the future and build back better to support our children, young people and their families

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